



Mounds of clean fill sit ready to spread on the base at the former Naval Air Warfare Center in Warminster.
(Staff photo by Nanette Kardaszkes)

NAWC cleanup advances

By Harry Yanoshak
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WARMINSTER — Little red flags tell back-hoes where the junk pile ends. Colors removed from the soil profile — blacks, browns and darker browns — clearly show what's decades-decayed trash, what's compacted clay and what's native soil.

Starting at the runway's edge and running parallel to Kirk Road, topsoil is trucked in and dropped on backfilled trenches, to be used for spreading and seeding.

Underground, pipes divert contaminated water to a treatment plant west of Jacksonville Road. Inside tanks, carbon particles lock horns with volatile organic compounds. Water comes out clean and pours into

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a tributary of the Little Neshamuny Creek.

Near the water plant, topsoil covers where crews had removed underground gasoline and aircraft fuel tanks and fuel-tainted soil. Nearby, more fuel tanks await excavation.

Environmental cleanup projects dot the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division, an 824-acre military research complex in Warminster, Northampton and Ivyland. The center closed last fall.

The base has four major problem areas — marked A through D. On a map, the areas together comprise about 200 acres. Most of the base is not a problem environmentally, according to the Navy.

"Area A," the largest, lies on the base's northern edge, west of Jacksonville Road. "B" is on the eastern side, adjacent to Shenandoah Woods Navy housing. "C" starts at the auxiliary runway's edge, parallel to Kirk Road; and "D" is the main research buildings west of Jacksonville Road and along Street Road.

The Navy has \$30 million to rid the environmental health risks before the land is reused for business, housing and recreation. Many cleanup projects could take more than a year to finish, said Tom Ames, the Navy's environmental cleanup coordinator.

"Even though we've gone through base closure, cleanup continues," Ames said last week. "We're continuing to work with agencies to clean up this base as promptly as we can."

A number of residents whose wells were contaminated by Navy operations have been connected to public water. The Navy has drilled wells outside its property to check how far and how wide chemicals have migrated. More off-site wells are planned.

Navy reports say Area A's polluted ground water drifts far off base and poses the greatest potential health risk to neighboring residents. The water contains cancer-causing trichloroethylene and car-

bon tetrachloride, other solvents and metals used in plating. The soil contains metals, probably from a waste water pond that was once on site, according to the Navy.

Despite the health risk, the area's cleanup is barely out of the planning stages.

Wells proposed for a \$5 million chemical treatment plant nearby haven't been drilled yet, although work should begin in late summer, Ames said.

The Navy will be on base until work is finished and the land is transferred, he said. The Navy's responsibility continues indefinitely, he said. The federal government indemnifies Warminster, Northampton and Ivyland from Navy-related environmental problems, he said.

Area B holds household trash, construction debris and ground-water pollution.

Last week, contractors started removing trash and contaminated soil; additional soil and ground-water testing will determine if there's more work ahead. Navy reports show a small amount of ground water contamination — pollution that remains on base.

Area C holds trash and ground water contaminated with petroleum and solvents. Crews have removed roughly 12,800 tons of garbage from eight trenches — paper, glass, styrofoam, concrete and other building material. Soil contaminated with solvents has been removed and trucked off base. The holes have been backfilled. Topsoil and grass seed will be added soon. And ground water from six wells in Area C is flowing into the treatment facility.

West of the trenches is a runway used for training Navy aircraft firefighters. The Navy isn't sure if training exercises contaminated ground water.

The garbage trenches are an unlikely source of ground-water contamination, according to a March 1997 report drafted by Ames, the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Environmental Protection.

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